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God's Plan for the Terrible-Two's

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God's Plan for the Terrible-Two's

Abstract

"I have developed an appreciation of the fact that this age we refer to as "the terrible twos," is a necessary, and even vital, stage in our development as humans."

Posting about how the "terrible two's" are a necessary, albeit frustrating, part of normal human development from *In All Things* - an online hub committed to the claim that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has implications for the entire world.

<http://inallthings.org/gods-plan-for-the-terrible-twos/>

Keywords

In All Things, developmental psychology, parenting, two year olds, toddlers

Disciplines

Christianity | Developmental Psychology

Comments

In All Things is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service at Dordt College](#).

God's Plan for the Terrible-Two's

 [all in allthings.org/gods-plan-for-the-terrible-twos/](http://allthings.org/gods-plan-for-the-terrible-twos/)

Luralyn Helming

Week day mornings at my house have a certain variable pattern. After getting myself dressed, I get my two-year old son dressed and ready for the day. Some mornings he is excited when I come into his room, telling me “truck, truck” as he has heard the traffic on the street. Other mornings he is uninterested in even standing in his crib, quite convinced he can decide to remain in bed all day. At breakfast, some days he eats with relish and other days he paints the table with yogurt. Some mornings he is excited to push the button to open the garage door, other days he tried to throw himself out of my arms in avoidance which is quickly followed by tears when I push the button and he has lost his opportunity to do so. After dropping him off at daycare, I head to campus to teach my students what happens in human development, giving me much opportunity to reflect on my son's development as I see it happen. I consider what science says is happening in the toddler stage of development, in comparison to the real life experiences of living with one.

I have developed an appreciation of the fact that this age we refer to as “the terrible twos,” is a necessary, and even vital, stage in our development as humans. I do often have to remind myself of the value of the stage: every time my son refuses to wake up in the morning, or tries to pull his shoes off as fast as I put them on, or has a melt down because I only handed him a clean tissue and not also the dirty tissue I just wiped his nose with.

Many well-known developmental theorists have addressed this stage. Sigmund Freud named the period between ages 18 months and three years the anal stage. According to his theory, this stage is about children learning to balance between immediate gratification and delayed gratification, especially through toilet training. If this balance is not appropriately achieved, children will develop a weak sense of self. Erik Erikson named the stage autonomy versus shame and doubt. He, too, attributed a growing degree of personal control to children in this age. Children in this stage seek greater control over their own behaviors as they begin to realize that they are autonomous beings. Jean Piaget's theory of development is not concerned with the development of self, but rather with the development of thinking. In his theory two-years olds are at the transition from sensorimotor stage, where learning is about coordinating their sensory experiences with motor abilities, to the pre-operational stage, where they are developing mental representations and eventually able to mentally represent physical actions.

Although all of these theories have different views of development during this age, there is a bigger picture that can be seen through all of them. Two-years olds are starting to realize that they are independent of their parents. They now have the mental capacity to separate out who they are and recognize that they can make their own choices, though, they don't yet have the ability to understand what that means.

In the real world, this transition can mean that easy-going infants suddenly and relentlessly want their own way in all things. They have suddenly realized that they can refuse to do things or can make choices between options, and once they realize that, they want to know just how far this newfound ability can reach. Can they say no to everything? Is there always another option? At the same time, they are only just developing their ability to mentally represent ideas. So although they may say no to pushing the garage door button, they cannot plan ahead to realize that means you will push the garage door button. Saying no to supper is not connected to hunger; they may just want to see what happens when they say no. I like to test this out sometimes, as my son likes to use “no,” but has little idea what it means. So I put on his shoes

as I ask are you ready to put on your shoes? No. As we walk out the door, are you ready to get in the car? No. As we pull out of the garage, are you ready to go to daycare? No. Until I end with my ultimate question, do you know what no means? No. This always makes me laugh, which then makes him laugh. The twos seem terrible because our children suddenly want their way, while at the same time they don't have the mental facility to really know what their way is or what it will mean more than 30 seconds into the future.

As social beings who live in community, we are dependent on others but we act on our own. The terrible twos are the first step towards our development into independent, rational creatures. During this stage children are both establishing their independence from their parents and making a big step forward in terms of their ability to think and how they process mental information. This development will set the stage for future steps towards independence. Without these first steps towards independence, where two-year olds are establishing what they have control over and where the boundaries are, they will struggle in future steps towards independence and interdependence.

Over the course of development we change from a single cell at conception to intelligent beings able to commune with God and attempting to understand our own role in his world. The terrible twos are one step in this process, one necessary-though frustrating-step.

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